

Strategies for Maximizing SAFETY TEAM PERFORMANCE

By Kimberly Randall and Cody Cravens

To maximize safety results through associate involvement, OSH professionals must have a strategy that engages and motivates employees in the most effective way for each of three key roles: line-level workers, line-level supervisors and managers.

Designing strategies specific to each role allows an organization to optimally leverage each role's respective strengths, talents and knowledge.

Line-Level Workers

The involvement and buy-in of line-level workers are critical to a successful safety program. Depending on the type of work being performed, these employees are typically the ones at highest risk for injury; therefore, they can derive the most benefit from promoting a safety-conscious culture. They are also the experts in their respective jobs and can often provide the best information on the hazards associated with a job and whether a proposed solution will effectively address those hazards or create another issue.

What is the most effective way to motivate and engage line-level workers? Optimal results are achieved through

education, empowerment and a demonstrated commitment to following through on their safety improvement recommendations. By utilizing a defined curriculum, such as the OSHA 10-hour general industry course, associates learn how to identify safety hazards and are introduced to methods that address those hazards and prevent injuries. However, the training curriculum should not be limited to the members of a safety committee. It is important that all line-level workers are trained. In fact, it is recommended to transition beyond the traditional safety committee format and, instead, establish several safety teams such that all line-level workers in every work area are involved.

Empower associates by giving them meaningful tasks that help identify and address issues such as poor ergonomics or by implementing a behavior-based safety

observation program. As Walsh (2019) emphasizes, taking an approach that directly involves workers is the essence of a successful ergonomic improvement program. Figure 1 illustrates the impact that line-level workers can have in improving safety if afforded the proper tools, training and opportunity to provide input.

Most importantly, show line-level workers that their contributions make a difference and that the company is acting on their recommendations in a timely manner. A great way to accomplish this is to post a safety board in a location that is visible to all workers in the area and keep it updated regularly. In addition to posting team goals and accomplishments, information should be posted on the status of open projects, safety work orders and other important activities so that progress on each goal is clearly visible to all team members.

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FIGURE 1
EXAMPLE RISK REDUCTION RESULTS

This figure illustrates the impact that an engaged and ergonomics-trained workforce can have. In this case, a team led entirely by members of an hourly workforce developed a solution that reduced the ergonomic risk score of an inspection operation by 80%.

Quantitative Analysis

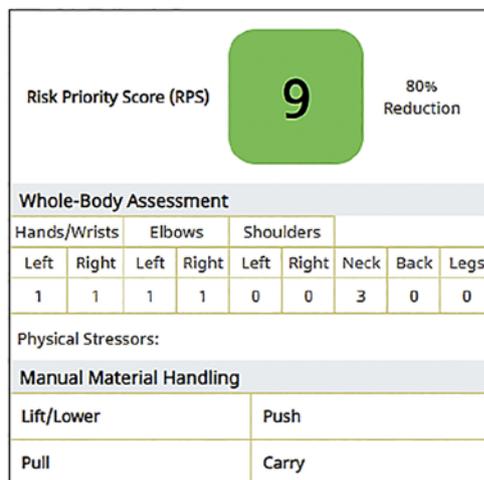
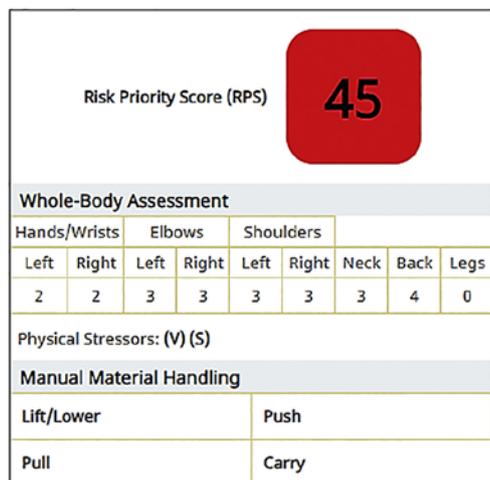


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Line-level workers are a cornerstone in high-performing safety cultures when effectively engaged and motivated. By encouraging greater levels of associate involvement, investing in formal safety education and visibly demonstrating that leadership values the inputs and insights of these associates, an organization can develop its workforce into true safety champions.

Line-Level Supervisors

Failing to properly engage and motivate line-level supervisors is a key reason some safety programs may fall short of expectations. Specifically, traditional safety committee structures do not always effectively maximize the strengths and capabilities of associates in supervisory roles. An effective way to combat this issue is to transform the safety committee structure from one multidisciplinary safety committee covering a full facility to several safety teams based on work centers or departments with line-level supervisors leading the teams. A side benefit of this approach is preventing the rut that some facilities get into by continuing to have the same volunteers each year. Thus, participation becomes an expectation for everyone, and this model provides a much greater volume of ideas.

Just as with line-level workers, education, empowerment and visible support are all key factors in optimizing the outcomes from associates in a supervisory role. For supervisors, educational efforts should be focused on understanding and applying safety metrics, developing specific leadership competencies and learning to give effective presentations on team performance to management.

To effectively guide their teams to successful outcomes, supervisors must first understand the goals and metrics used to measure team success. Training should be provided to fill any existing gaps. OSHA rates, facility safety targets and training goals should be reviewed to ensure that supervisors understand what these goals and metrics are, how they are tracked and what resources are available to support them (Figure 2). With this understanding, supervisors will have a strong foundation to help them move

the needle on their respective team's safety performance.

In a white paper on leadership, Folkman (2015) identifies 16 competencies differentiating the most effective leaders. When working with supervisors, it is important to focus on strengthening their competencies in several of these areas such as championing change, developing a strategic perspective and building relationships. For example, after orienting supervisors on the purpose and goal of the new safety team structure, coach them in strategizing how to most effectively structure their work area safety teams to maximize associate involvement rather than developing a specific model that they are required to adopt.

For the competency of building relationships, which is necessary for all business endeavors and not limited to safety teams, invest in training on emotional intelligence. A good emotional intelligence training program will result in the higher cooperation levels and supportive behaviors among supervisors. Also, the new safety teams should ideally be implemented in waves, which will allow supervisors who participated early in the process to become mentors for the others. This emphasizes peer-to-peer coaching and encourages trust and collaboration.

In this recommended safety team format, each safety team supervisor makes a formal presentation to the management team periodically throughout the year. Helping supervisors learn how to create presentations, participate in formal meetings and deliver information on team performance is also important in the transition process.

The last element of the strategy for supervisors is to develop a formal dashboard to deliver regular feedback on team performance. Having first reinforced cooperation and collaboration among the supervisors, the dashboard can promote healthy competition versus animosity. While the education and empowerment of line-level workers helps to create the core nucleus of safety champions in the facility, creating healthy competition and developing the skills of line-level supervisors drive the teams to the next level of performance.

Managers

Effectively engaging and motivating managers involves shifting their focus from being the drivers of the safety effort to acting as coaches and advisors. As Maurer (2013) cautions, top-heavy management should be avoided, as it can stifle meetings and decisions. This new safety team format helps prevent this concern because it alters the way managers contribute to safety team efforts.

Each month, on a rotating basis, supervisors from different departments report their results to the management team. In this new format, the managers now form a steering committee to provide guidance and feedback to supervisors, define priorities (especially when conflicts arise), remove roadblocks and allocate resources.

Managers are accustomed to being "on the hook" for departmental goals, so delegating responsibility can require some recalibration in thinking. It is important to prepare managers for their redefined focus and different manner of contribution to the safety program by implement-

ing training to bolster their skills in key areas. Leadership development courses can be useful in the months leading up to the rollout of the first wave of new safety teams to help managers understand effective ways to manage change and learn to lead from a coaching mindset.

By leveraging managers' skills in their highest form as coaches and advisors, they can inspire supervisors to higher levels of performance. By setting the right tone and acting as a strong support system for the safety teams, managers create an environment in which teams can achieve outstanding safety results.

FIGURE 2 CASCADING FACILITY GOALS TO INDIVIDUAL SAFETY TEAMS

This chart depicts an example of how the goals of the individual work area teams can support (and may ultimately exceed) facility-wide safety goals. If teams are rolled out in waves during the transition phase, team goals must be adjusted periodically.

Goals	Facility wide	Work area teams
Lost-time injuries	0	0
Ergonomic assessments	4/quarter	2/quarter
Ergonomic solutions	2/quarter	2/quarter
BBS observations	50/month	10/month
Obstacle/barrier solutions	5/quarter	2/quarter
EHS training completion	100%	100%
OSHA 10-hour training	100%	100%

Results

What kind of results have been achieved by implementing these strategies? For the authors' organization, combining these role-specific strategies with the evolution of the company's safety team format from a traditional committee to a more effective multiteam structure has created better engagement in the workforce and helped the company reduce safety incidents. These results align to the organization's Hoshin Kanri plan, or lean strategic management plan, which targets reducing the injury rate by 50% and ranking in the top quartile in industrial manufacturing safety.

Implementing these strategies also yielded unanticipated side benefits. The company has seen supervisors excel in solving issues and taking proactive measures such as instituting advanced cleaning efforts to address COVID-19 and driving increased associate involvement and understanding by having line-level workers lead the safety board review during management's Gemba walks. Teams are sharing accomplishments and lessons learned with other teams, and

this has helped strengthen safety performance across the organization. Even better, the company is seeing a collaborative, peer-to-peer development model evolve at all levels instead of the historical top-down model. This helps to support a sustainably improved environment and culture.

Conclusion

By engaging and motivating line-level workers, line supervisors and managers, the three key roles impacting safety culture and performance, OSH professionals can maximize the results of the safety programs in their organizations. The strategies should be designed to leverage the specific strengths, talents and knowledge of each role. By focusing

efforts toward education, empowerment and visibility of employee contributions, optimal outcomes can be achieved. **PSJ**

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